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“Casey Saw It Through”: Guy “Machine Gun” Molony and the Creation of a Rugged
Individual

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
History

By

Brett Spencer

B.A., Kent State University, 2012

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Abstract

This thesis explores the influence of masculinity in twentieth century American foreign policy through examining the career of Guy “Machine Gun” Molony. Molony was an Irish American mercenary from New Orleans, whose career saw the transformation of Honduras from a banana republic to a recipient of dollar diplomacy. Unlike the majority of mercenaries who did not use their experience to build successful careers, Molony made a name for himself in American newspapers, becoming respected and even feared by policemen and politicians. His life tells a fascinating tale of the individual male in American foreign policy, where rebellious youth used war and instability to create heroic images of themselves. This thesis argues that the U.S. State Department borrowed from the independent mercenary model, building on a foundation laid out by men like Molony to implement dollar diplomacy. Guy Molony’s career is a telling example of how perceived ideas of manhood carried imperial intentions during the era of manifest destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. Although scholars tend to focus on Western expansion when examining the ideology of manifest destiny, this thesis explores how mercenaries like Guy Molony, followed by the U.S. State Department, continued to look southward to Central America as a means for American expansion.

Keywords: foreign policy, masculinity, Honduras, filibustering, dollar diplomacy

Introduction

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Samuel Zemurray, who was quietly becoming the most important man in the international banana trade, assisted Manuel Bonilla, the former president of Honduras, to recruit a small group of local New Orleans mercenaries to reinstate his presidency. Banana companies had recently transformed the port of New Orleans into a launching off point into Central America, encouraging many to hire themselves out as soldiers of fortune to escape the law. Honduras in particular became a place of refuge for criminals, lacking an enforced extradition policy with the United States until 1912. Many of the disadvantaged in New Orleans looked to Honduras as a place to reinvent themselves and act out their ideas of the heroic and masculine. Those who fought as mercenaries however, found themselves in a disadvantaged position once attempting to reintegrate into society. Many stayed in Honduras in hopes of being called back into action, and few managed to use the experience to pivot themselves into stable careers.

This thesis will examine the impact of masculine identity on American and Honduran relations. Although scholarship exists on masculinity in foreign policy, little has been written with a focus on Central America or its relationship with New Orleans. By focusing on the career of Guy Molony, this thesis will examine how masculinity affected American and Honduran relations, and how men used these relations for personal gain. By focusing on Molony, a New Orleans native, this research will provide new insight into how men used American foreign policy to prove their masculinity, using New Orleans as a launching point to take up the strenuous life of the rugged individual. This research will

also explore the influence of private imperialists on legitimate foreign policy, a theme rarely explored by scholars of Central American relations.

Scholars of this period, including Patricia Rodriguez, have referred to New Orleans as the banana capital of the world, which housed the headquarters of United Fruit Company.¹ In the late 1800s into the early 1900s, New Orleans served as a hub for trade and migration between the United States and Latin America, the latter of which was beginning to emerge as stable, democratic nations. Around the turn of the century, banana companies expanded by dealing directly with the governments of Central America, and mercenaries referred to the region as “the isthmus.” Zemurray’s company, Cuyamel Fruit, became the victorious underdog when it successfully led a *coup d’etat* to reinstate Manuel Bonilla, the former president of Honduras, who was living in exile in New Orleans. In return, Cuyamel could use its Honduran land holdings to farm bananas, placing the company several steps ahead of its competitors. This decision led to journalists referring to the country as a banana republic, and soon after Zemurray was able to sell his company to United Fruit. One of the men hired by Zemurray to carry out the coup was Lee Christmas, a colorblind railroad worker who became a general in Honduras. The other was his close friend and counterpart, Guy “Machine Gun” Molony.

Guy Molony, born in New Orleans and of Irish descent, fought alongside Lee Christmas and succeeded in reinstating Manuel Bonilla in 1911. Molony, an idealist filibuster throughout his life, left New Orleans at sixteen to fight in several countries

¹ Anna Patricia Rodriguez, *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures and Cultures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

including South Africa and the Philippines.² However, Molony did not gain national acclaim for his mercenary work until fighting in Honduras. Bonilla sought refuge in the French Quarter and was a close friend of Samuel Zemurray, who was president of United Fruit. Bonilla and Zemurray, paired with Guy Molony and Lee Christmas, are often used in secondary literature to add local color to the early years of the banana republics, though little attention has been paid to the careers of mercenaries like Guy Molony, who was a celebrated hero once he returned to New Orleans. Newspapers across the country followed his exploits in Honduras, and the *New Orleans Item* was quick to celebrate his fighting abilities when he was installed as the Superintendent of Police of New Orleans in 1921.

However, Molony's varied career was in contrast to the majority of Americans living in the tropics, including Edward Burke. Burke was an Irish-American who had also lived in New Orleans for several years. After facing charges for selling bogus bonds during the Cotton Centennial of 1884, Burke fled to Honduras to take advantage of the lack of extradition policy with the United States. Unlike Molony who would return to New Orleans after becoming a wealthy, well-known man, Burke stayed in Honduras until his death. The story of these two opposing experiences can help us understand the complexities in the role New Orleans played in Central America at the turn of the 20th century, and the effect these relations had on the politics and culture of New Orleans.

What makes Molony's story unique is that he spent most of his working life in Honduras while maintaining strong ties politically to New Orleans. After Molony fought in Honduras in 1911, he stayed in the country, working at a brewery and operating a rice mill

² Filibustering is the act of engaging in unauthorized warfare in a foreign country.

for the majority of his life.³ However, Molony made regular trips to New Orleans, where he was idolized by the Irish population and feared by opposing politicians. Molony left work in Honduras to serve in World War I, where he was stationed in France and Germany from 1917 to 1919 and bestowed the title of Lieutenant Colonel.⁴ Molony then returned to New Orleans, where his background secured him a spot as New Orleans Superintendent of Police in 1921, which he served for four years before returning to Honduras.⁵ In 1934, Molony assisted mayoral candidate Semmes T. Walmsley in the 1934 election, making headlines with his strong-armed intimidation.⁶ Save for these two remarkable periods away from Honduras, Molony spent his post-mercenary days in San Pedro Sula and Puerto Cortez, managing to secure wealth and local standing where few Americans had succeeded. Edward Burke, who speculated in minerals, completely cut himself off socially and politically from New Orleans. Although he managed to make some money through mineral speculation, when he died in Honduras in 1928 the Honduran government seized his assets in the country. Lee Christmas, misguided by his notoriety, failed to start several business ventures, leaving him penniless during his last days. Molony, however, died with an estate worth almost \$700,000, retiring to New Orleans after working nearly fifty years in Honduras, which insured that he would leave an inheritance.⁷ Molony and Christmas, like many expatriates in Central America, invented caricatures of themselves for the media. They attempted to show the American public that they lived ideal male lives, which would

³ "Unpublished Memoirs," Guy Molony Papers, Manuscripts Collection 198, Box 1, Folder 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans [hereinafter cited as GMP].

⁴ *The Times-Picayune*, 25 Nov. 1920, 1.

⁵ Folder 1, GMP.

⁶ T. Semmes Walmsley was the incumbent mayoral candidate during the 1934 election. Walmsley vehemently opposed Louisiana Governor Huey Long, who wanted Walmsley out of office, resulting in Walmsley requesting the assistance of Molony during an escalating standoff.

⁷ "Untitled Newspaper Article" Hermann Bacher Deutsch Papers, Manuscripts Collection 130, Box 19, Folder 26, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans [hereinafter cited as HBDP].

have proved difficult in a quickly developing city like New Orleans. In reality, however, American freebooters and filibusters in Central America led difficult and stagnant careers. Molony managed to change this narrative for himself, which as history suggests, is unique in comparison to both his peers and elder generations.

Historiography

American mercenaries and the banana companies that employed them have a long history with the Central American isthmus. Lester Langley's and Thomas Schoonover's *The Banana Men* splits American mercenary work in Central America into three epochs, beginning with rogue adventurer William Walker who became president of Nicaragua in the 1850s. The American mercenaries or "soldiers of fortune" of the early 1900s mark the second epoch, with the American funded paramilitary forces of the 1980s comprising the third. Langley and Schoonover argue that all three periods were fueled by principles of self-interest with little concern for a stable democracy in Central America. Many mercenaries saw it as the next great place for individual opportunity and quick riches, as Langley and Schoonover note, "Lee Christmas may have gone off to Honduras in 1894 because he had little future in New Orleans; the banana men, however, knew that Central America was the next great frontier of opportunity."⁸

Langley and Schoonover suggest that many of the men who decided to fight in Central America held the romanticized ideals of Western frontiersmen. Mercenaries

⁸ Lester Langley and Thomas Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 7.

rationalized that a civilized Central America would need assistance from American business to bring them into the industrialized world. While world powers, particularly the United States, decided how to best extract profit from Honduras and Nicaragua, groups of mercenaries, often rounded up in the bars of New Orleans, boarded ships for a slice of fame and dreams of wealth. Some, like Molony, became local heroes thanks to tabloid articles that followed their every move. Though Langley and Schoonover focus on the mercenaries behind the events of all three epochs, little has been written to understand the complexities of these individuals. A more thorough look at the careers of people like Molony is essential in separating folklore from fact, which can give us a better understanding of both the personal and political ties between New Orleans and Central America.

Primary sources used by Langley and Schoonover include the Hermann Deutsch papers (Tulane University, Latin American Library), the Edward Burke Collection (Louisiana State University Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library) and the *Times-Picayune* archives (available online, America's Historical Newspapers). The Hermann Deutsch collection is of particular significance for learning about the careers of New Orleans mercenaries, as it contains correspondence with Christmas and Molony, while Molony's own collection at Tulane contains but a few items. Including Honduran news sources from the early 1900s would have benefited the work to give a more balanced approach on how the presence of mercenaries affected the people of Central America. The current narrative of these events would benefit from a history from below perspective, considering that many of the major players, including Molony, were of a lower social rank prior to fighting in Honduras.

Rather than focusing on people during the rise of the banana trade, Dan Koeppel's *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World*, traces the entire history of the fruit from its origin to the battles fought on its behalf. Koeppel argues that entire cities were built to cater to American banana companies, and as Koeppel explains through the example of businessman Minor Keith, expansion into Central America directly involved citizens of New Orleans as he tried to establish a railroad in an inhospitable climate.

Desperate for help, Keith then enlisted prisoners from the jails of New Orleans. Only those with no hope of otherwise being released agreed to take on the assignment. Of the seven hundred who volunteered to work on the Costa Rican Railroad (in return for a pardon after the project was finished), only twenty-five survived.⁹

Businesses on the ground in the United States boomed as well, as the cities of the Gulf Coast prepared for the mass importation of the tropical fruit. Koeppel notes, "Ice became so essential to banana profitability that at least one banana merchant—an importer named Joseph Vaccaro, based in New Orleans—bought up every ice factory along the Gulf Coast."¹⁰ Vaccaro went on to start Standard Fruit Company, the primary competition for United Fruit, also had its headquarters in New Orleans. Both held their own banana towns across the Caribbean coast of Central America with boats leaving constantly for the port of New Orleans.

Koeppel focuses his attention on the financial and political impact of the banana trade, mainly using mercenaries and stevedores to add local color. His work is thoroughly researched and spans several countries around the globe. He worked with the Honduran Agricultural Research Foundation, among other groups, that were able to give him

⁹ Dan Koeppel, *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 59.

¹⁰ Koeppel, *Banana*, 56.

exceptional primary material. Koeppel collected interviews from around the world, as well as travelogues documenting Central America in the late 1800s, a majority of which have been archived online. Like Langley and Schoonover, Koeppel uses different newspaper sources, including the *Times-Picayune* and *New York Times*.

The two works differ in that Langley and Schoonover focus on the mercenaries involved in shaping the banana republics, while Koeppel's work spans the globe to emphasize the impact of the banana on the world economy. Both relied on newspapers that are biased in favor of American exceptionalism, while other newspapers used unreliable information given by mercenaries concerned about their masculine image. The narrative given by mercenaries is taken as fact, presently leaving works on the subject at risk of publishing unreliable data. Langley and Schoonover argue that, "Newspapers of Christmas's era chronicled the careers of American soldiers of fortune in the tropics in the heyday of militant American empire building—not surprisingly, often exaggerating their exploits—and supplying a generally reliable chronology of their activities."¹¹ Neither of these works give an accurate account of the effects of empire building on the people of Central and South America. Recent Latin American scholars have published work to fill this gap, including Dario Euraque's *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic: Region and State in Honduras, 1870-1972*,¹² and Anna Patricia Rodriguez's *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures*.¹³

Since neither work examines this period from the perspective of New Orleans, a work focusing on New Orleans's role in American expansion southward reveals significant

¹¹ Langley and Schoonover, *Banana Men*, 206.

¹² Dario Euraque, *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic: Region and State in Honduras, 1870-1972* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹³ Rodriguez, *Dividing the Isthmus*.

information on New Orleans during this period, and its importance as a home for exiled people from Latin America. Scholars such as Rebecca Scott have written of several notable Latin Americans who sought refuge in New Orleans during times of instability, but there has yet to be a comprehensive work that connects New Orleans with this region so vital to its prosperity.¹⁴ Scholarship should focus on the fluidity between New Orleans and Central America, as several New Orleans natives also fled to Central America to avoid incarceration. As scholars uncover more of these connections, and the complexities of the individuals involved, we may find the two areas connected in ways that have hitherto been overlooked.

The most cited work regarding this subject is *The Incredible Yanqui by New Orleans Item* journalist Hermann Deutsch, which gives an entertaining look at the career of General Lee Christmas.¹⁵ Deutsch is one of the only people who photographed Christmas and spent extended time in Honduras, where he got to know the towns making headlines in the United States. Deutsch published this work in 1931, when many from this group of mercenaries were still living, giving him the opportunity to interview several Americans who worked and lived in Honduras. However, many of these interviews include excessive creative liberties, leaving scholars who use them at risk of blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Even the events that led Christmas to Honduras have been exaggerated in several news articles; some place him on the verge of suicide, with others painting him as a romantic vagabond. His image was later heightened to cult status with the depiction of his

¹⁴ Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hebrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Hermann Deutsch. *The Incredible Yanqui: The Career of Lee Christmas* (New York: Pelican, 1931).

career in pulp fiction novels and magazines that were geared toward a young, male American audience.¹⁶

Deutsch gives scholars a close look into the life of a famous American mercenary. While works such as *The Banana Men* focuses on the full group of people involved with the banana trade, *The Incredible Yanqui* takes a closer look at the entire life of Christmas. It is an intimate look at a complicated career, shaped by a quick glimpse of fame and fortune that created legends out of otherwise ordinary people. Deutsch published one of the earliest works on the subject of American mercenaries in Honduras, which relied heavily on interviews with Guy Molony. Though often lacking in sources, this work has been a starting point for scholars interested in the subject since its publication in 1931.

Guy Molony: Creating the Myth

Guy Molony was born in New Orleans on January 28, 1884. At the age of sixteen, Molony boarded a ship bound for South Africa, where he talked his way into participating as a mercenary in the Boer War. This marked the start of a long life of international fighting that led him to the Philippines during the War of 1898-1902, where he learned the skills necessary to operate machine guns. Like many mercenaries, Molony did little writing, leaving large gaps in his biography. What facts we do know are largely from newspapers quoting a group of mercenaries who were more concerned with validating their masculinity in the press than presenting a factual narrative of events. Therefore, what

¹⁶ In May of 1934, *Railroad Stories* depicted an armed Christmas on the cover of their magazine with the headline "Lee Christmas, The Illinois Central Hoghead Who Became Dictator of Honduras: A True Story."

scholars are often left with is a hyper-masculine images of the mercenaries, images many spent the rest of their lives trying to fulfill. Molony, who picked up his “Machine Gun” persona during his time in the Philippines, returned to New Orleans in the early 1900s where he befriended Lee Christmas. Christmas was also a Louisiana native and perhaps the best known of the mercenaries during this period. He became a General in Honduras and was know for his audacious quotes in American newspapers, spinning tales about his heroic fighting abilities.

New Orleans by the beginning of the twentieth century had become the headquarters of Latin American revolutionary activity, drawing rebels and politicians from Mexico to Venezuela since the early nineteenth century. The *New York Times*, which continually reported on the progress of the revolutionary groups, often warned of the instability in the region.¹⁷

As the hotbed of revolution and the Mecca of filibusters, New Orleans is preparing for another annual upheaval in Central America, and unless the United States steps in, almost the entire strip of land from the southern border of Mexico to Panama, with the possible exception of Costa Rica, within the next six months may be in upheaval.¹⁸

This upheaval, though not as urgent as the *New York Times* suggested, began in the hotels and bars in New Orleans, which largely created the “banana republics” that catered to Cuyamel and United Fruit Company. Sam Zemurray had been courting many Central American politicians to curry favor for the expansion of banana plantations in undeveloped parts of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In Honduras, the result was a successful coup

¹⁷ See appendix A.

¹⁸ *The New York Times*, 12 June 1911, 1.

attempt that placed Manuel Bonilla back in power, thanks to the help of Molony and Christmas. The results caused sensational reports across the United States, and rumors began to spread of how the mercenaries were able to depart without being detained *en route*. American banks had been attempting to negotiate Honduras' staggering debt, and such backroom deals soured things within the State Department, as the *Times-Picayune* recounted.

In New Orleans he [Zemurray] found allies: Manuel Bonilla, exiled former president of Honduras; "General" Lee Christmas, soldier of fortune; Guy (Machine Gun) Molony, a Boer War veteran. Zemurray supplied them with a machine gun, a case of rifles and a yacht. The bankers and the State Department, which had approved the Morgan loan, trailed them closely. A secret service man watched the conspirators lounging in Basin Street. When he left, the three fled, boarded the yacht and dashed for Honduras with a U.S. gunboat in pursuit. But they got ashore, raised an army of 600 men and captured the country in two weeks.¹⁹

This quick and audacious coup solidified Zemurray's power in the region, and Christmas and Molony became exaggerated folk heroes overnight. Stories emerged across the United States about their humble beginnings and heroic behavior. *The New York Times* especially swooned over Christmas, which at one point called him "A DUMAS HERO IN REAL LIFE" and "the most spectacular figure in Central America to-day."²⁰ *The Times-Picayune* gave Molony more spotlight, with headlines claiming the "Orleanian's heroism [is] proven."²¹ This allowed the two mercenaries a brief period of fame in their social circles, but although Molony's career was just getting starting, for Lee Christmas it was the beginning of the end. The two remained close friends, though Christmas struggled to live up to the image he had

¹⁹ *The Times-Picayune*, 15 Aug. 1954, 25.

²⁰ *The New York Times*, 15 Jan. 1911, 4.

²¹ *The Times-Picayune*, 30 Jan. 1911, 24.

created of himself. Within ten years, he drank himself into obscurity and became ill. Molony's career took a different turn, establishing a career that allowed him to cover the expenses of Christmas' funeral when he died in New Orleans in 1924. Molony became a successful expatriate who remained popular in his hometown until his own death, dispelling the average narrative of the later American filibusters. His life, shaped by early twentieth century notions of American manhood, progressed with changes in Central American relations, allowing Molony to continue to reap the benefits of working in Central American well beyond his work as a mercenary.

"No Soldier of Fortune": Beyond the Myth

The beginning of the 1900s spanned the era of the rugged individualism in American masculinity.²² Coined by President Theodore Roosevelt, rugged individualism became a catch-all for men to identify hardship and imperial values as an ongoing part of life, making violence a natural and reoccurring theme. Gail Bederman explains: "To prove their virility, as a race and a nation, American men needed to take up the 'strenuous life' and strive to advance civilization—through imperialistic warfare and racial violence if necessary."²³ Like Roosevelt, Guy Molony used newspaper articles to mold his hyper-masculine image, using any attempt to speak about his career as a way to prove his heroic attributes. He often reverted back to his experience as machine-gunner to prove his credibility on a variety of unrelated subjects. In one article, Molony is described with pipe

²² Kristin Hoganson. *Fighting For American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

²³ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 171.

in hand in a comfortable front porch chair, informing a female reporter on his philosophies of love and marriage. Titled “Guy Molony Warns Girls Best Way to Catch Husbands Is Not Through Cleverness,” this article shows how Molony attempts to construct an image to live up to his ideals of manhood.

He grinned cheerfully out of the depths of the big chair, looking about as much like one of the world’s most debonair daredevils as like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. A stranger watching him would have thought he was president of the Whozis Hairpin Factory giving his daughter some shrewd fatherly advice.

“Do you play tennis, young lady?”

The reporter nodded.

“Well, that’s an example. Don’t ever win a game from a man unless you are just playing for exercise.”²⁴

Molony may not have tricked reporter Gwen Bristow with his macho persona, but he was not the type to notice. It was exactly this difficulty in reinforcing a glorified reputation that many former mercenaries chose to stay in the country that brought them a moment of glory.

Molony gained international notoriety for his fighting in the *Hornet* Expedition.²⁵ He and Christmas were hailed in the news as heroes for their takeover of the northern coast of Honduras. After arriving on the Bay Islands near the coast from La Ceiba, the group, along with Bay Islanders who held resentment toward the mestizo majority, placed the islands under Bonilla’s control without active fighting.²⁶ There, they changed ownership of the *Hornet*, replacing an American flag with that of Honduras, sidestepping the chance of being

²⁴ *The Times-Picayune*, 5 Aug. 1928, 4.

²⁵ The *Hornet* was the name of the ship used by Lee Christmas and Guy Molony to implement their seizure of the Honduran coast in January 1911.

²⁶ The Bay Islands were historically an English colony whose majority did not identify with mainland Honduras.

charged with using a U.S. vessel to instigate violence. After arriving on the mainland they marched on to La Ceiba, resulting in their myriad group of soldiers taking the city after a battle against opposition forces from the Davila administration.²⁷ Davila differed from Bonilla in many ways, including his preference for Zemurray's primary competition, Vaccaro Brothers and Company.²⁸ For the Vaccaros and Zemurray, it seemed that whichever President held office determined which company held access to the most resources. The northern coast was largely more developed than the rest of the country, and contained the primary hub for trade with the rest of the world. Seizing the coast ultimately secured a victory for Bonilla, who had control of its most important city. Although this was one of the most notable events in Molony's career, he skips over the entire affair in his memoirs, reflecting instead on the colorful lives of friends and acquaintances in Honduras who had been peopling the coast for decades.

In the early 1900s many Americans viewed Central and South America as a place to fulfill the doctrine of "manifest destiny" southward. Further, in the eyes of men who lived on the fringes of stability and employment, it was a place to start over failed careers and prove that regardless of their failings, they were men. Samuel Crowther's book on the American tropics is an account of white men facing the region, putting their southward gaze into perspective. "For four and a half centuries the white man has battled against nature and against his fellows in that region between Cancer and Capricorn which forms the American tropics. And nature until lately has always won. Only now is man gaining a

²⁷ For a more detailed, though embellished account, see *The Incredible Yanqui*.

²⁸ Both companies were based in New Orleans.

measure of mastery.”²⁹ American men like Christmas and Molony were able to tell themselves that they were fulfilling a national duty in a very foreign environment, all the while engaging in activities perceived as masculine and heroic. However, this image was fragile at best, causing many Americans to crumble over the years. “For the most they led drab and sordid lives and quickly or slowly, but always surely, drank themselves to death. Some of them were sound men of ability who had slipped just once or who had been unfortunate. But the rank and file were misfits who would have been on the Bowery had not fate taken them to the beach.”³⁰ Molony, who could have fit this description, made strategic decisions that prevented him from leading a lifestyle that overtook other mercenaries like Lee Christmas.

Molony went back and forth in his career between New Orleans and Honduras, while Christmas became something near a Lost Cause hero for American men in the region.³¹ Leo Braudy suggests that defeat provokes a particularly masculine identity, both in times of conflict and in anticipation for a challenging environment. “Some of the most marked simplifications of masculine norms occurred in reaction to defeat. But the underlying principle was the same: war required a masculinity as purified and as streamlined as a spear; deviation meant defeat.”³² In a quickly modernizing New Orleans, where sedentary jobs increasingly replaced backbreaking work, Central America became a place of intrigue for young Americans to abstain from participating in an American dream

²⁹ Samuel Crowther, *The Romance and Rise of the American Tropics* (New York: Garden City Press, 1929), V.

³⁰ Crowther, *The Romance and Rise of the American Tropics*, 163.

³¹ Referring to the post-Confederate ideology following the Civil War, which idealized defeated Confederate soldiers as heroic in their bitterness and conviction to Confederate values.

³² Leo Baudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Random House, 2003), 350.

that they did not feel actively involved in. Molony's and Christmas' most active years as mercenaries directly preceded the publication of Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*, a poem urging the willing youth of the United States to enter the Philippines. Published in 1899 with the subheading "The United States and the Philippine Islands," Kipling romanticized American imperialism and spoke directly to an audience that would take heed to his verse: a young Guy Molony went to fight in the Philippines, where he created his folk hero, machine-gunner persona.³³

Though Guy Molony did little writing, it is clear that he was heavily influenced by music and verse. His notebook, which he brought with him during his earliest fighting years, is slim in detail but covered in Irish anthems and military ballads. With little personal writing, these songs are essential to better interpret his career motivations and identity. With titles including "The Fighting Race" and "Casey Saw It Through," it is apparent that he identified with the themes of violence and honor that pervade them, which he affectionately named "Soldier Growls."³⁴

Casey sat in his bamboo bunk,
And knuckled his blinking eyes;
He'd done a hitch--and did it well,
Beneath the tropical skies.
"My man," said the Cap, "your buzzard's here,
Tho' still there's lots to do;
So what will it be?" Then Casey said—
"I'll see the damned thing through."³⁵

³³ Langley and Schoonover, *Banana Men*, 99.

³⁴ "Guy Molony Notebook, 1906-1908," Box 19, HBDP.

³⁵ Ibid.

In Molony's world of rugged individuals, men are resigned to their heroic fatalism, making Central America a place that had to be suffered or endured to prove one's masculinity. Or as Horrocks suggests of the western hero image, the frontiersman "is not simply a white male conqueror, he also embodies a brooding sense of unease, mutilation, unwantedness."³⁶ It is this dichotomous atmosphere that led Lee Christmas to the brink, attempting in vain to start several uncanny business ventures after resigning in a rage from his post in Puerto Cortez.³⁷ Instead of continuing down the same path by fighting in the wars of other countries, Molony did the unexpected: he used his connections as a mercenary to gain notoriety in New Orleans, returning for extended period to serve as the Superintendent of Police or to assist political allies while maintaining a successful business in Honduras.

Though Molony lived in Honduras for a majority of his life, he would occasionally appear fresh from the Port of New Orleans, where his arrival was quickly made public in the local papers.³⁸ On one such occasion Molony returned home only to become New Orleans Superintendent of Police, a post he served from 1921 to 1925. Mayor Andrew McShane, also of Irish descent, appointed Molony and publicly requested that he crack down on prostitution and non-violent crime.³⁹ His reputation as an audacious filibuster, paired with his time as a Lieutenant Colonel in World War I, made him an easy sell to the Irish population as they joined the ranks of public administrations in New Orleans. In Molony's unpublished memoirs, which are full of colorful recollections of Honduras, he

³⁶ Roger Horrocks, *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity and Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 170.

³⁷ "Undated Letter," HBDP, Box 19.

³⁸ *New Orleans Item*, 11 Jan. 1934, 1.

³⁹ *Herald-Journal*, 25 Aug. 1924, 7.

shares only one line about the experience. “Was superintendent of Police New Orleans 1921-1925 and not a very good one.”⁴⁰ This was likely in reference to accusations of corruption within his administration, as well as using threats of violence regularly in newspapers and speeches.⁴¹ Molony was both criticized and praised for his handling of organized crime and growing nativism, and arrest records remained high throughout his tenure.⁴² Regardless, upon ending his term in 1925 he was hailed as the “nation’s best policeman.”⁴³ He returned to Honduras within days of completing his tenure, and would return years later to filibuster in his hometown.

The circumstances surrounding Molony’s later return to New Orleans are at once hazy and well documented. Several national newspapers, including *The Times-Picayune* and *The Herald-Journal* concluded that Molony had returned to assist Mayoral candidate T. Semmes Walmsley during the voting season of 1934.⁴⁴ Molony had been running a rice mill in San Pedro Sula, retiring from active fighting with the exception of two years to assist President Carias, who became President during the Honduran revolution of 1924.⁴⁵ Molony notes in his memoirs “this about finished my soldiering,” though the events that unfolded upon his return to New Orleans may suggest otherwise.⁴⁶ On September 7th, 1934, Guy Molony appeared with one hundred armed men at the polls in support of Semmes Walmsley.⁴⁷ This came one day after Molony announced to Senator Huey Long that he

⁴⁰ Folder 1, GMP.

⁴¹ Vyhnanek, Louis. *Unorganized Crime: New Orleans in the 1920s* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana Press, 1998), 22.

⁴² John V. Baiamonte, *Spirit of Vengeance: Nativism and Louisiana Justice 1921-1924* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 57.

⁴³ *The Times-Picayune*, 29 Jan. 1925, 1.

⁴⁴ *The Herald-Journal*, 7 Sept. 1934, 1.

⁴⁵ *The Times-Picayune*, 13 Sept. 1987, 3.

⁴⁶ Folder 1, GMP.

⁴⁷ *The Chicago Tribune*, 8 Sept. 1934, 1.

“would be glad to place machine guns in New Orleans” to ensure Walmsley’s election as mayor.⁴⁸ An infuriated Long went to the papers, which made headlines on Election Day to no avail. Semmes Walmsley went on to win the election by a large majority. Molony had successfully flipped the narrative of American filibustering, returning from the tropics to instate the candidate he supported, and who may have supported Molony in return for his ability to curry favor with the public through audacious speeches and armed force.⁴⁹

Guy Molony’s career took an optimistic turn in comparison to the majority who fled to Honduras to escape the law or define their manhood. Edward Burke, another Irish-American who lived in New Orleans had an opposing experience of expatriate life in Honduras. Burke fled New Orleans after pocketing money from bad bonds during the World Cotton Exposition of 1884, and climbed the ranks in Honduran politics.⁵⁰ Although Burke was not a soldier of fortune like Lee Christmas, he also fell into relative obscurity in the United States and remained in Honduras the rest of his life, even after Louisiana waived the charges held against him. He held office in Tegucigalpa and dabbled in real estate in the largely undeveloped regions of Yuscaran and Olancho.⁵¹ Although well liked by Honduran general public, government officials were not happy with Burke, who began to deal in mineral rights, which may have led to a seizure of his estate upon his death in 1928.⁵² Unlike Burke, Molony was successful in reintegrating into New Orleans society while

⁴⁸ *Herald-Journal*, 7 Sept. 1934, 1. See appendix C.

⁴⁹ See appendix B.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Conley. “The Making of an American Imperialist: Major Edward Austin Burke, Reconstruction New Orleans, and the Road to Central America.” Master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, 2012.

⁵¹ “Letter from Secretary Manuel Lemus to Alfonso L. Pinart, President of the French Science Commission in Central America,” Box 1, Edward Austin Burke Papers, Manuscripts Collection Z-C 200, Bancroft Library, University of Berkeley, Berkeley [hereinafter cited as EABP].

⁵² “Letter from Edward Burke to President Manuel Bonilla,” Box 1, EABP.

holding on to the hyper-masculine image portrayed in the newspapers. Reporters would seek his advice on a variety of topics, often filling up space with his charming war stories. Reflecting on the “tragic figure” of Burke, Molony laments on his complicated life and admires his character in an attempt to save face for a man whose reputation had long suffered from scandal.

A great man and when he died in Tegucigalpa and they were going to have a big funeral there/the Indians from Yuscaran came to Tegucigalpa took the body and carried on their shoulders for about ninety miles and buried in Yuscaran amongst as they put it, the people that loved him, I know the old gentlemen would have liked it that way himself...⁵³

Molony always referred to Burke as “Major” Burke, having fought with the Confederate Army. He admired many of Burke’s pre-civil war ideas and looked at him as a tragic figure whose ideals did not mesh with the post-Civil War United States. Many Confederates left the South for Central America, settling in British and Spanish Honduras. Burke, like many of his contemporaries, was a mineral speculator while holding ambiguous office positions in Tegucigalpa. Molony, who was a generation younger, frowned on speculating as a career after observing many of his elders lose a fortune in the process.

Joe Reed, was a Prospector at heart, died broke,
Lee Marsden, Prospector, died broke,
Charley Jeffs, Prospector, died broke,
Tom Nestor, Prospector died broke.⁵⁴

Molony saw that a majority of the Americans in Honduras were doing poorly in health and finances, which would have pushed him to ilk out a different career path than the trouble-

⁵³ Folder 1, GMP.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

dodgers who faded into obscurity. Though Molony admired Edward Burke, it certainly became apparent to him to steer away from Burke's Confederate fatalism and try his hand at starting his own business, an endeavor that was increasingly gaining the support by the State Department.

Prior to gaining the support of big business, Americans like Burke went to Honduras to start over their lives in the largely undeveloped countryside. Burke took this a step further, and was one of the first people to gain concessions to territories in Olancho and Yoro, where minerals including gold were plentiful.⁵⁵ Honduran officials disapproved of his business tactics, which involved selling mineral rights to acquaintances in Austin, Texas and New Orleans.⁵⁶ Though it is unclear what happened to the land rights that were still in Burke's possession upon his death in 1928, the Honduran government may have taken back the land due to their displeasure with Burke's behavior. However, Molony went to great lengths in his memoirs to clear Burke's reputation and show that the people of Honduras loved him. Burke assumed responsibility for establishing himself in a new American frontier, while other Southerners awaited the annexation of sovereign nations from Cuba to Venezuela.

The post Civil War milieu of Burke's generation caused them to look further south in hopes of continuing a Confederate ideology that failed in the U.S. Though expatriate colonies were formed from Belize to Brazil, it was in Honduras, which lacked an official extradition policy with the U.S., that many would-be criminals attempted to save face and reassert their manhood. Lee Christmas, who left New Orleans after drunkenly crashing a

⁵⁵ "Letter from Secretary Manuel Lemus to Alfonso L. Pinart, President of the French Science Commission in Central America," Box 1, EABP.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

train on the job, fled for Puerto Cortez. William Sydney Porter, a well-known author and one time embezzler, sought refuge in a Trujillo hotel before returning to New Orleans to face a jail sentence.⁵⁷ His collection *Cabbages and Kings*,⁵⁸ where he coins the term “banana republic,” largely draws from his time spent in Honduras.⁵⁹ Molony remained a realist about life in Honduras and did not allow romantic notions to affect career decisions, a lesson likely learned from elder generations of Americans in the region.

Molony ended his career as a mercenary as the United States began using “dollar diplomacy” as a means to expand its outward sprawl into the tropics. Honduras was one of the first countries to fall under its influence; expedited no doubt by the path that companies like United Fruit and Cuyamel Fruit had laid out for the State Department. Honduras, sharing borders with Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua made it an ideal place to survey revolutionary activity in the region, which the United States later used to its advantage in Guatemala and Nicaragua.⁶⁰ With a majority of the administrations in the region formally trained and supported by the US State Department, Honduras for many became the capitalist dream they had hoped for. As Walter LaFeber suggests, “Honduras was less a nation than a custom’s house surrounded by adventurers.”⁶¹ However, Molony did not agree with the direction the US government was taking by heavily arming small countries while pushing isolationist policy.

I don’t know much about what all of the Republics do but Honduras is under a military dictatorship and I don’t see how they are going to get out from under it with

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 1985.

⁵⁸ O. Henry, *Cabbages and Kings* (New York: Pithy Press, 1910).

⁵⁹ Porter published his work under the pseudonym O. Henry.

⁶⁰ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States and Central America* (New York: Norton and Company, 1983), 9.

⁶¹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 42.

the guns, planes, and etc. that are being furnished them by Uncle Sams boys; and all of these arms have never been used against (an) invasion only amongst and against their own people, and you can put it down as gospel that with this power in the hands of the army they will or try to run things in all (of) Central America.⁶²

San Pedro Sula, where Molony wrote his memoirs, has since been considered the most violent city in the world statistically.⁶³ The Central American nations were deeply indebted to Europe in the early 1900s, which the U.S. saw as a threat to their expansionist policies. If the U.S. did not find a way to negotiate those debts in their favor, there would be no choice but to allow a heavier European presence on the continent.

President Taft's administration began lobbying heavily in favor of U.S. enterprises in the Americas, a stark change in tone from the days of the *The Hornet* expedition in 1911. Both Molony and Christmas, whose every move was being traced by the State Department, slowly became allies with the government. The State Department would later hire Christmas to report on suspicious activity in Guatemala.⁶⁴ Molony's unsavory stance toward U.S. intervention provides telling insight as the region became engulfed in violence, showing how dollar diplomacy was in fact "diplomacy helping dollars."⁶⁵

The path to dollar diplomacy was in many ways laid out by filibusters like William Walker and Lee Christmas who were devout followers of the Monroe Doctrine.⁶⁶ Successful filibustering, being an act of private warfare or legislative obstruction, provided proof to

⁶² Folder 1, GMP.

⁶³ 2015 annual report of *Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal*.

⁶⁴ Box 19, Folders 22-24, HBDP.

⁶⁵ Dollar diplomacy is the act of financially supporting a foreign country while promoting national business interests abroad. For more information see Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 209.

⁶⁶ William Walker was a well-known American mercenary who became President of Nicaragua. He was executed in Trujillo, Honduras in 1860.

the assumption that taking control of the American continent was inevitable. The imperial intentions acted out by filibusters bled over into legitimate foreign policy with the shaping of dollar diplomacy, which Emily Rosenberg defines as “a controversial U.S. policy that attempted to use private bank loans to leverage the acceptance of financial advisors by foreign governments that U.S. officials and investors considered unstable.”⁶⁷ To be sure, Honduras had defaulted annually on its debts to England leading up to the *Hornet* expedition in 1911, when J.P. Morgan was a few days from restructuring Honduran debt.⁶⁸ However, funded by Zemurray and implemented by Christmas and Molony, this nearly monumental experiment was hijacked with the reinstating of Manuel Bonilla, whose advisers refused to sign any agreement, leaving that privilege to Zemurray.⁶⁹

The *Hornet* expedition showed a shift away from filibustering toward a type of business structure overseen by U.S. government officials, many of which encouraged the opening and trading with American owned businesses. Molony’s generation, laying out a quasi-blueprint for the future banana republics, came from a long line of individuals that had used Central America for financial gain. Handfuls of criminals found a safe haven in Puerto Cortes, deemed “a colony of defaulters,” where a motley crew assembled around the bars like they had done in New Orleans.⁷⁰ As Molony noted in his memoirs, many were mineral speculators who died broke, while others like Burke landed government jobs and gave commissions to American acquaintances. By the time Molony had arrived in Honduras, there was a sizable expatriate community in both Cortes and San Pedro Sula,

⁶⁷ Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 66.

⁶⁹ Paul Dosal, *Doing Business With Dictators: A Political History of United Fruit in Guatemala, 1899-1944* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 82.

⁷⁰ *The New York Times*, 15 Sept. 1903, 1.

where Molony would eventually run a rice company. Thanks to the State Department's efforts in influencing Central American politics, American business was highly encouraged by the often violent filibustering of previous decades.

Before this gradual shift away from independent expeditions, young men in New Orleans, many of which were leading stagnant lives of various backgrounds, were pulled into a number of expeditions with rumors of easy wealth and power in the tropics. In the 1850s, when William Walker rallied support for his expedition to Nicaragua, over fifty percent of the New Orleans population was born abroad.⁷¹ Molony's own parents were born in Ireland, at a time before Irish-Americans climbed the ranks of police departments around the country. For young men from immigrant families, a chance at quick money and proving ones bravery was too tempting to resist, making the Crescent City an ideal place for revolutionaries to gain support.

This is a city in which I would dread being idle, as it is a kind of rendezvous for all reckless characters and men of desperate fortunes—whose acquaintances I should judge it would be hard to shun were a person out of Employment—for they are always looking up young men without prospects for various filibustering and piratical expeditions.⁷²

Filibustering took New Orleans by storm while becoming a haven for political intellectuals from Latin America.⁷³ Newspapers, including the *Times-Picayune* and the *Daily Delta* regularly defended the actions of the filibustering community, referring to them as “our

⁷¹ Robert May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 94.

⁷² Ibid. 95.

⁷³ The *New York Times*, 12 June 1911, 1.

filibusters.”⁷⁴ Local burlesque shows, books and plays lionized their work, with titles including “Those 15,000 Filibusters” and “The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans.”⁷⁵ By the time Molony was of age to actively participate in mercenary activities, there had already been pro-interventionist attitude growing in the city for over fifty years.

The beginning of New Orleans based filibustering came with the birth of the term “manifest destiny.” First coined by John O’Sullivan in 1845 in reference to the annexation of Texas, manifest destiny defined the United States as the inevitable conqueror of the American continent, opening the floodgates for egotistically minded frontiersmen to seek their destiny.

Reared in the manifest destiny ambience that encouraged expansion, these adventurers claimed a variety of motivations, ranging from the expansion of slavery to financial gain to personal glory and political power. All were born a bit too late to participate in the expansion southward, and so their eyes fell upon Latin America as a target for future territorial aggrandizement.⁷⁶

The expansionist ideology of Manifest destiny permanently changed the course of U.S. foreign policy. With years of a wider Latin-Caribbean solidarity fomenting in newspapers and public rallies, New Orleans was an ideal focal point for the likes of William Walker to find sympathizers and funding for their expeditions. Narciso Lopez, a Venezuelan mercenary who attempted to overthrow Spanish Cuba, got a majority of his funding from

⁷⁴ May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 71.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 72.

⁷⁶ Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 63.

L.J. Sigur, a Creole who owned the New Orleans *Daily Delta*.⁷⁷ His first expedition attempt came only four years after O'Sullivan coined the term.

Like many young filibusters, Molony thought his actions were not only justified, but also beneficial for the good of Central Americans whose governments appeared inferior to the United States. With the doctrine of manifest destiny as proof of their good merits, young men blindly followed whichever leader or revolutionary would favor Uncle Sam, regardless of public consensus. The results were often prohibitive to American foreign policy, degrading diplomatic relations and lessening the chances of legitimately opening up the discussion of annexation.

Ironically, the filibuster's invasions of foreign domains helped to subvert the very process of territorial expansion that they were presumably advancing. They also jeopardized U.S. commercial penetration of the tropics, caused crises with European and Latin countries that threatened to erupt in war, and bequeathed a legacy of anti-Americanism in Mexico and Central America that lingers into the modern era.⁷⁸

Instead of helping to install a new era of progress in Central America, the U.S. government continued to fund administrations that used violence to keep order, sending weapons to the supporters of their ideal candidate. Molony, who was living in Honduras while the U.S. heavily armed its Central American supporters, vehemently opposed this method of gaining support, seeing it as a step back from the idealism of the turn of the century. "It is a peculiar thing, the manner in which our military forces manage to pull the wool over the eyes of the good citizens of these United States."⁷⁹ Molony failed to see the irony that he

⁷⁷ Chester Urban, "New Orleans and the Cuban Question During the Lopez Expeditions of 1849-1851: A Local Study in Manifest Destiny." *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 22, nos. 3-4 (1939), 1121.

⁷⁸ May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, XIII.

⁷⁹ Folder 1, GMP.

and Lee Christmas had armed their own groups of supporters. He saw his actions as fulfilling American prophecy, and not as arming belligerent militias. To be sure, his brief memoirs defend the nobility of indigenous people who tended to enjoy the jobs that United Fruit created over the prejudice of the mestizo majority government. He predicted an uprising in Central America due to the United States unevenly arming military dictatorships that oppressed their peasant classes, creating an anti-American atmosphere. "Gentlemen it is going to cost us plenty some of these days, I have been around these parts for a mighty long time and I have never seen a time when the American was so generally hated as he is now."⁸⁰

Manifest destiny and dollar diplomacy came at odds at a time where reactions to American intervention were generally favored as positive and beneficial.⁸¹ However, the reality was that dollar diplomacy was not assuring the annexation of territories for U.S. possession. Instead, the State Department's focus was to lobby their efforts to make countries operate in the favor of U.S. business interests. Sam Zemurray, who had recently ceded an additional twenty-five thousand acres in Honduras, saw this coming through the negotiations he had with the State Department following the collapse of the J.P. Morgan bailout.⁸² The more aggressive and pro-business Taft administration ultimately meant the end of the idealist filibustering nurtured in New Orleans. Even if there was an anti-American sentiment in Honduras, Molony was able to directly benefit from the pro-business outlook of the military dictatorship, which continued to favor American business.

⁸⁰ Folder 1, GMP.

⁸¹ Thomas Patterson, J. Garry Clifford, et. al., *American Foreign Relations: Since 1895*, Volume 2 (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2005), 11.

⁸² Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World*, 73.

The similarities between the U.S. government's and mercenary actions did not end at armed intervention. Proving one's manhood, a constant theme of the Southern mercenary period, was also a predominant factor in the behavior leading up to the Spanish American War that Molony used to create his heroic image. Notable politicians including Theodore Roosevelt depended on newspaper articles to assert masculine qualities for their campaigns. Jingoists, who were warmongers that aggressively opposed more passive diplomacy, used the same newspapers to degrade men who they deemed "aunties"⁸³ and lacking the backbone necessary to lead the country.⁸⁴ Molony, who fought in the Spanish-American War, used newspapers to show off his masculine qualities and instill fear into his opponents as Police Chief of New Orleans. The same newspapers that collected Molony's stories spread an ideology that revolutionary activity, both politically and economically, was a victory for American ideals and Latin American progress.

Although the effect the banana companies had on Honduran politics was considerable, the effect it had on shaping the economy has been debated. Revisionist historians of Central America have questioned the impact left by Standard and United Fruit, particularly in the so called "banana towns" on the coast. Although United Fruit pumped money into small coastal villages on the north coast, Honduran scholar Dario Enrique suggests that many economic and cultural differences were established before Zemmurray set foot in the country.⁸⁵ The historical narrative paints the fruit companies as doing considerable harm to the Honduran economy and its people, using dangerous chemicals and over-working their employees. Locals point to the decrepitude of "banana" towns like

⁸³ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 92.

⁸⁴ Jingoists were a varied group of hyper-nationalistic war supporters that used gendered stereotypes to gain support for military action.

⁸⁵ Enrique, *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic*, 4.

Tela and Omoa to suggest how little the government has invested in these towns comparably.⁸⁶ This ideology places the likes of Lee Christmas and Guy Molony in a positive light, although both were using the region for self-serving and unflattering reasons. Reporters such as Deutsch, conveying American mercenaries as folksy heroes misconceived both the impact and significance of the banana companies on foreign soil, laying the foundation of American exceptionalism toward the region for decades to come.⁸⁷

For Americans at the time the success of American business in the tropics was a success for manifest destiny and superiority over other nations on the continent. By investing money into Central American infrastructure to service companies in the United States, the majority saw the gesture as a means to introduce inferior countries to the cutting edge modernity of American democracy. However, the reality of these investments, both from the United States government and American owned business, created a culture of corruption that stifled progress across the region.

Conclusion

The story of Guy Molony is an ideal micro-history to understand the supercharged complexities of early twentieth century U.S. and Central American relations. As foreign policy in the American Tropics began to solidify, the Roosevelt and Taft administrations did more than borrow a few ideas from the filibusters who predated the bureaucratic structure that promoted fear mongering in the region. There was a gradual shift from a business-minded

⁸⁶ Personal observation during fieldwork in Honduras, 2014.

⁸⁷ American Exceptionalism is the perceived character that the United States is unique in its form of democracy and ideals.

mentality in the early 1900s to the political playground it quickly became leading up to the Cold War, as American administrations wielded power over countries that depended on imports as well as exporting their own agricultural and mineral resources.

Suddenly, political figures held the power to topple governments in the familiar fashion that United Fruit had done through hired mercenaries, this time by heavily arming supporters. In many cases, the Americas became an experiment in U.S. foreign policy to be mimicked the world over, as well known Latin American scholar Greg Grandin suggests: “The history of Latin America, a region that long bore the brunt of the kind of righteous violence enshrined in the Bush Doctrine, has much to say about Washington’s current drive toward global hegemony, particularly on how its ideologues have come to believe that American power itself is without limits.”⁸⁸ This pushing of the American agenda, whether it is for personal gain or political access, was a fundamental theme across the American tropics, traced from post-colonial filibusters to politicians supporting American business ventures in the region.

These ties led to an influx of Central American workers and intelligentsia into New Orleans as far back as the nineteenth century, as Rodriguez notes. “In the late nineteenth century, members of the Central American elite classes, political dissidents, workers in transnational companies (fruit, coffee, railroads, and the Panama Canal), and others resettled in port cities such as San Francisco, New Orleans and New York.”⁸⁹ New Orleans, operating as a frontier city on the other side of the Caribbean, doubled in importance as its location on the Mississippi River gave it access to the interior of the United States as well as

⁸⁸ Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2006), 9.

⁸⁹ Rodriguez, *Dividing the Isthmus*, 168.

the greater Atlantic. This imperial agenda persisted as an influx of Americans from the fringes of society went to New Orleans to take advantage of the ongoing fight for Central American democracy and American expansion southward. Mercenaries and filibusters in Central America almost exclusively left from the port of New Orleans starting in the mid-nineteenth century, quickly becoming a well-known destination to meet, plan and implement revolutions and empire building.

There has been throughout history a foreign presence in Central America, particularly of the United States, forcing an adventurous form of manifest destiny southward since the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine.⁹⁰ American intervention in Central American affairs, originally exploited by filibusters who led expeditions in search of fame, handed their formula over to big business, where it slowly evolved into government policy. Scholarship has closely examined the reactions to this pro-American agenda, and how it affects the citizens of these nations. There has been increasing attention to Honduras, a country previously propped up by the banana trade that now faces endemic issues of violence, poverty and corruption. The life of Guy Molony, if examined in the context of American foreign policy, is a telling example of the significance of masculinity at a micro-historical level. The study of dollar diplomacy, which “bridges the subdisciplines of diplomatic, economic and cultural history,” should include these later American filibusters who tested the framework on behalf of big business.⁹¹ Molony’s life and career, which spanned the frontiers of American imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century, shows

⁹⁰ Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

⁹¹ Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World*, 3.

at a micro level the complexities of gender, politics and socio-economic issues in early twentieth century American foreign policy.

Guy Molony stayed in Honduras until he retired to New Orleans in 1962.⁹² There, his days were spent on the front porch of his family's home on Webster Street, until his death ten years later in 1972. He lived until the age of eighty-eight, and is buried Greenwood Cemetery in New Orleans. Obituaries favored his heroic fighting and brackish language, paying particular attention to the amount of money he had earned as a mercenary and businessman.⁹³ Molony whose estate was worth \$675,386, was a far cry from his filibustering peers like Lee Christmas, who's last days were supported by Molony.⁹⁴ His ability to establish a fruitful career where few succeeded was largely due to adapting to the changing diplomatic and economic relations between the United States and Central America. The implementation of dollar diplomacy created an encouraging business environment for Americans in Central America, where individuals began investing in business and infrastructure instead of speculating in minerals like Burke and the post-Civil War generation. Unlike Molony, Edward Burke lost the rights to his estate after his death, a difficulty that Molony escaped by moving back to New Orleans for an early retirement.

To understand the complexities of Molony's career from a foreign policy perspective, it is important to consider the breeding ground of revolution that New Orleans had become by the turn of the twentieth century. Although little attention has been paid to the considerable efforts of Louisiana natives in early American foreign policy, ties to the

⁹² *The Times-Picayune*, 13 Sept. 1987, 3.

⁹³ Although Molony undoubtedly made a decent living running a rice mill, it is possible that Walmsley rewarded him for his support during the 1934 New Orleans Election.

⁹⁴ "Untitled Newspaper Article," Box 19, HBDP.

city can be found in nearly every filibustering attempt in Central America and beyond. Though quasi-official in their implementation, it was these very uprisings planned in the bars of New Orleans that would inspire Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba and the CIA coup to oust President Arbenz from Guatemala.⁹⁵ People like Molony were models for the State Department's agenda in the region, proving to officials that American men were destined to rule inferior nations. Further, the outlook Americans had of Honduras in particular as a "colony of defaulters" suggests that American criminals had already "taken" the country, leaving the State to sort out their mess.⁹⁶

Scholars of the Global South suggest that hotbeds of revolution have shaped foreign policy since the earliest days of colonialism.⁹⁷ The Latin Quarter of Paris, which saw not only Latin American intellectuals but also the future anti-colonial leaders of Algeria and Vietnam, created a similar hub for deciphering national identity in exile.

Often textured by the turfs and theaters furnished by the French Communist Party, interwar Paris thus developed a series of meeting places – cafés, restaurants, hostels, private apartments, libraries, headquarters of student associations, print shops, or trade union halls – that eventually formed a sort of urban anti-imperialist circuit.⁹⁸

Comparably, the New Orleans French Quarter became a gathering point for a different kind of imperialism, one that theoretically replaced government with big business. Many

⁹⁵ Roosevelt's march on Cuba in many ways mimicked the Lopez Expedition from New Orleans, while harsh blows dealt to the banana companies heavily influenced the 1954 coup in Guatemala. In a perversion of the Monroe Doctrine, the State Department saw the redistribution of land in Guatemala as a direct threat to American democracy and business interests in the region.

⁹⁶ *The New York Times*, 15 Sept. 1903, 1.

⁹⁷ The Global South, as opposed to the Global North, are those countries largely in the Southern Hemisphere which rank low to moderate in human development. Many of these countries were colonized, and post-colonial scholars suggest that colonialism is a primary reason why human development is lower in comparison to the Northern countries.

⁹⁸ Michael Goebel, "The Latin Quarter and the Third World," *Global Urban History*: Freie Universität Berlin, PDF Article.

countries, particularly in Central America, owed huge debts that prevented them from making national investment. However, unlike in Paris, where young intellectuals founded Marxist networks, New Orleans remained largely imperialist, pro-democratic and pro-capitalist during the era of filibustering. Latin American rebel leaders from Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Honduras and Mexico used the urban setting of New Orleans as their means to gain attention for prospective filibusters to support the overthrow of outdated regimes. American big business was quickly expanding into Central and South America, and took advantage of the lack of infrastructure and weak political economy, promising large investments to whoever would take the bait.

Molony fits neatly into this epoch, where young men believed they were helping a corrupt and undeveloped political system. Molony often compared himself as equal to the Hondurans he worked with, directing his angst at faceless political systems that withheld opportunity to the peasant class. Young men were told to take up what Roosevelt called “the strenuous life” and to avoid those characteristics that labeled them as “sissys” or “old women of both sexes.”⁹⁹ It became important not only to prove one’s individual manhood, but that the United States was a nation of “stern men with empire in the brains.”¹⁰⁰ The problem for many like Molony was what to do professionally after taking up this lifestyle. He found a means to fulfill his masculine image by constantly provoking the face of order, working with the underdog even if this went against his ideals. Unlike other filibusters of his generation, Molony successfully used his mercenary experience domestically, making

⁹⁹ Sarah Moore. *Empire on Display: San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 3.

headlines with threats of violence.¹⁰¹

Once the political climate changed with the introduction of dollar diplomacy, men abroad began to function as a means to ensure the interests of the United States. For the State Department, this meant arming allies to oppress opposition, which Molony opposed, even though he literally armed his own group of pro-Walmsley “supporters” in the 1934 New Orleans election. Like the Western Hero’s brooding sense of unwantedness, Molony had a complicated relationship with New Orleans, using his legend as a mercenary to incite both fear and adoration in a city where he did not feel at home.¹⁰² “Often damned at home and abroad as pirates, the filibusters were also worshipped as heroes by masses of people.”¹⁰³ Since Molony used newspapers to prove a hyper-masculine identity, it becomes difficult to understand the formal intention and impact of fulfilling this image on Molony himself. The result or perceived fear of not living up to the heroic standard presented in the *New York Times* led to the ruin of Lee Christmas, though Molony managed to stay relevant in New Orleans through supporting Walmsley and being connected with the Irish population of the city. Molony tended to remain outside of Honduran politics after the *Hornet* expedition, with the exception of a two-year stint assisting the Carias administration in 1932-1933.

For Molony, who was a first generation American, it was easier to live the strenuous life in the American tropics than in a quickly expanding New Orleans, where jobs were increasingly becoming sedentary. The fact that Molony found it worth writing memoirs of his career in Honduras is telling. Most mercenaries and filibusters were largely apolitical

¹⁰¹ See Appendix C.

¹⁰² Horrocks, *Male Myths and Icons*, 170.

¹⁰³ May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld*, XII.

and had minimal schooling or interest in books. Molony addresses this issue directly in his memoirs. "Education: Very little, about four years in McDonough No 13, Public School. What education I have was mostly given me by my sister who taught me the love of books, have read a great deal."¹⁰⁴ Molony spoke kindly of the Honduran people and trained many soldiers and rebels that he called "fine men," and shows no distinction in his memoirs between the Honduran officials and peers that he worked with and American prospectors. However, his memoirs largely focus on American and European men, showing that his ideology still remained within the white man's world of the Global North and South divide instilled during the colonial era.

There is a clear focus throughout Molony's brief memoirs in stressing the manhood of the people he describes. Of Burke he exclaims, "I assure you he was a man," or of Bonilla "fine man was with him until he died." Still, he seems preoccupied with the relevance of his topic, uncertain whether his career will be of any importance to others in the future.

I cannot tell you for the life of me why I wrote all this trash, I am not going to try and write any book and I cannot think of anyone who would be interested in it even amongst my own family.

To me the strangest part of the whole thing is that in spite of all this carrying on and going this way and that way, I have managed to accumulate quite a respectable bit of dough...¹⁰⁵

Molony remains one of the only mercenaries of the turn of the century that wrote about his experiences, giving scholars a rare opportunity to gain insight into the inner workings of a group of opportunists that cared little for self-reflection. Coincidentally, he spoke little of the *Hornet* expedition that made him well known in New Orleans, brushing it off as "the Hornet

¹⁰⁴ Folder 1, GMP.

¹⁰⁵ Folder 1, GMP.

episode which was the theme of a lot of nasty remarks, etc.”¹⁰⁶ Most interesting for scholars of foreign policy is his collecting of countless Americans who fought clandestinely or otherwise in Central American uprisings. Molony includes dozens of names that otherwise would have remained unrecorded. His list includes several New Orleans based mercenaries and soldiers, highlighting the importance of the city to Anglo-Latin solidarity before dollar diplomacy took its course. Molony led a career that shows the heated complexities of gender and politics during the era of the rugged individual. Molony’s writing, though scant in personal reflection, is a telling example of how many American men used political instability for financial opportunity, which he writes, “I hope it in some way helps you in your research, please remember I am not a writer by profession.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Folder 1, GMP.

Appendix A.



Appendix B.

Tells of Armed Men at Polls.

Evidence was brought out at the legislative hearing today that at the last municipal election, in which Walmsley defeated the Long candidate for mayor, Col. Molony had 100 armed men at the polls. This came from Jess McLane, ex-football star of Louisiana university, who testified that he had been hired with 75 others to work at the polls for Walmsley and that they reported to Molony. They were supposed to stop and detain voters for the opposition ticket, he said. They were all armed and furnished with ammunition.

The committee indicated that Col. Molony may be called up again before them at their session tomorrow. A lawyer named O'Keefe told a story about a holdup during the Molony régime on the police force. He said it was a frameup and that a police officer committed suicide rather than expose his chief.

Senator Long said that he had enough evidence to impeach two judges and wondered how soon the mayor would resign. This indicates another special session, which may be called on short notice. Explaining the presence of the troops the senator said:

"The legislative committee and its witnesses are not going to be further

[Continued on page 8, column 1.]

Long Declares Walmsley Hired Revolution Leader

Witness Says He Would Be
Glad to Place Machine
Guns in New Orleans

New Orleans, Sept. 6 (AP).—Senator Huey P. Long charged today that Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley had imported a leader of Central American revolutions to head an armed force in the September 11 congressional primary.

Guy R. Molony, the Central American soldier-of-fortune, denied that he had been hired to head a "group of gunmen," but told Long he would be "willing to do it."

Former Police Head.

Molony, former superintendent of police here, but noted for many years because of his activities in Central American revolutions, gave his testimony before the legislative committee investigating charges of vice and corruption in Walmsley's government.

"You came back here to New Orleans during the last election didn't you?" Long asked.

"Yes, on business," Molony replied.

"On that last visit didn't you establish a machine gun nest and

—Continued on Page 6, Col. 3—

THOMAS MAY BE SPEAKER AT THE FUNERAL OF SIX

New York, Sept. 6 (AP).—Norman Thomas, Socialist leader, may speak at the funeral of those killed in textile strike disorders at Honea Path, S. C., the American Federation of Silk Workers announced today.

"Norman Thomas, at present assisting the union strikers at McGuffey, Ohio, probably will be sent to the Southern states for an extended speaking tour on behalf of the strike committee. It is likely that he will be a speaker at the funeral of the workers killed by strike guards at Honea Path, S. C."

SAYS FIRM NAMED HOUSE OFFICIALS

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List of Abbreviations

EABP: Edward Austin Burke Papers

GMP: Guy Molony Papers

HBDP: Hermann Bacher Deutsch Papers

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Chicago Tribune

Herald-Journal

Herald-Tribune

The Milwaukee Journal

New Orleans Item

The New York Times

The Times-Picayune

B. Archival

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Vita

Brett Spencer was born in Northeast Ohio and currently resides in New Orleans, Louisiana. He holds a B.A. in English from Kent State University and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Certification from the Technical University of Dresden, Germany. He was a University of New Orleans Latin American Studies Scholar in 2014 and 2015 for research in Honduras and Cuba, and he was the recipient of the 2015 Muckley Scholars Award. His research focuses on solidarity between Louisiana and the Circum-Caribbean. Brett has traveled extensively in over forty countries from Cambodia to Bolivia. When he is not traveling light, he can be found biking across New Orleans or cooking at his home in the 8th Ward.